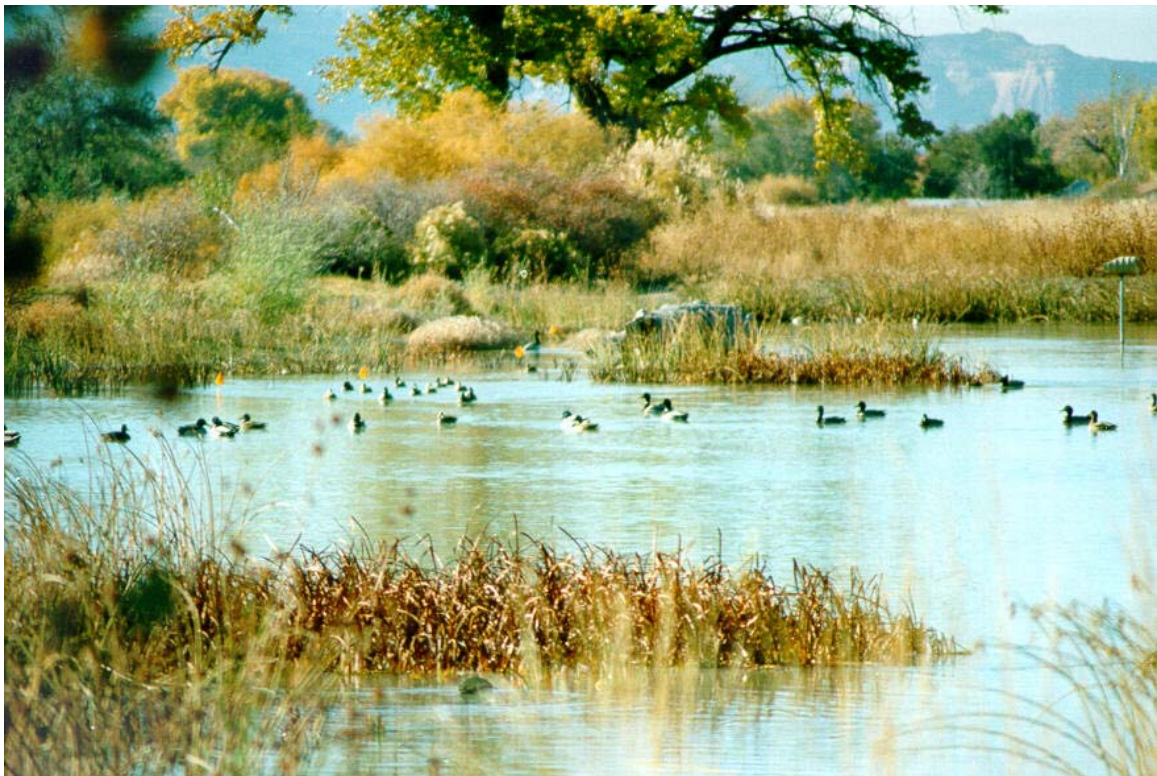

Final Report of the Los Cerritos Wetlands Study Group



Introduction

In the summer of 2004, Councilman Frank Colonna, asked a number of homeowners' groups and residents' associations to attend an exploratory meeting regarding the future of the Los Cerritos Wetlands and the surrounding area.

The driving force behind the desire to formalize community opinion was the announcement that a group of investors had put forth a plan to build a Home Depot on 16.1 acres of land at Studebaker and Loynes. The local residents openly protested and began a "Stop Home Depot" campaign.

Councilman Colonna, in an attempt to bring logic and civility back to a highly charged, emotional atmosphere, set the stage for a community based committee to explore the larger question of the general area and its future, not just the proposed Home Depot project.

The Los Cerritos Wetland Study Group (LCWSG) was formed and first met in August of 2004. A Chairman, Ric Trent, was elected and ground rules were established. Ten residents groups were represented on the Committee. The guiding premise of the group was, "We will avail ourselves of the experts in a number of different areas of consideration, and all be educated to the same FACTS at the same time." We decided that we would dedicate at least a year to the fact-finding, and at the end of the education period, we would issue our recommendation regarding the Study Area. Prior to the final report we intended to poll our various groups and associations regarding their opinions and attitudes about the future of the area under study. We also planned to hold a community input forum to allow anyone to come, and speak or write their opinion regarding the area.

This has been done and this report is the synoptic synthesis of all of those actions and efforts of the past fifteen months.

PART I: Executive Summary

After being educated by the experts, supported by Long Beach City Departments to answer our subsequent questions, and informed by residents and homeowners groups, one thing is patently clear... the taxpaying citizens of District 3 have a strong desire to preserve and restore the Los Cerritos Wetlands.

There are various opinions about how to go about this task and who or what will fund the acquisition and restoration. There are also numerous ideas regarding what extent and character the restoration should take. There is even some debate on the location, and definition of, the Wetlands themselves. But the one clear message is, that it is important that we act to ensure that the last approximately 2% of the Long Beach Wetland system will be preserved for posterity.

There are four pressing issues that need to be dealt with in order to start this process:

1. The Wetlands area is a mish-mash of zoning issues. Some of the land was incorporated into the City of Long Beach in the late 1990's. Some areas were certified by the California Coastal Commission and some were not. There needs to be a clarification and completion of the certification process along with a definitive explanation of where exactly the Wetlands boundaries are.
2. We have learned, during this process, that the study area has a long history as a waste dump for some very troubling and dangerous substances. Before any restoration of wetlands, or development around the wetlands there needs to be a definitive audit of where the bad stuff is, and what it is. Some of the chemicals that have been identified are reported to be cancer-causing pathogens. The City of Long Beach and others may face significant liability if any of these known dump sites are compromised by either a wetlands restoration effort or a development project.
3. The over-arching need is to clarify the possibilities for the whole study area. The LCWSG recommendation is that the SEADIP plan be revised and updated for the area of study. In order to accomplish this we recommend that the City Council direct the Planning Commission to establish an Ad Hoc Committee with all the support necessary to revise the South East Area Development and Improvement Plan.
4. The uniqueness of the study area adjacent lands has a number of commercial developers anxious to erect projects there. It is the recommendation of the LCWSG that a temporary moratorium be enacted

immediately for any and all projects in the Study Area. We further request that the Ad Hoc Committee recommend that heavy industrial development be banned in the Study Area. It doesn't require too vivid an imagination to see that the life-style and real estate value of the region is inconsistent with "heavy industrial" development. The future of Southeast Long Beach as a successful well functioning community and the future of the Study Area depends on a well thought out, fully integrated, over-view plan that takes all the pieces of this complex puzzle into consideration. If we allow hasty development of the Study Area, just for profit and some sales tax possibilities, we will pay the price of "piece-meal" development for generations. The LCWSG strongly recommends that a thorough master plan be completed before anything can be done that may harm the future opportunities of restoring the Los Cerritos Wetlands.

This report is divided into four subtopics: Wetlands, Environmental, Traffic, and Land Use. Each area has its own unique set of concerns and considerations.

1. **WETLANDS**—Preservation and restoration are important because the Los Cerritos Wetlands are
 - The last approximately 2% of surviving wetlands in Long Beach.
 - The last restorable estuary in Los Angeles County
 - A critical incubator for open ocean fish
 - A natural engine that cleanses and scrubs the pollution that comes with the environmentally unfriendly industry surrounding them
 - The habitat for a number of threatened wildlife and aquatic species
 - One of the only land uses that can, if healthy, begin to neutralize some of the toxins that have been historically dumped and buried in this area
2. **ENVIRONMENTAL**—Pollution, quality of life issues, and the natural environment all have immediate concerns
 - The Study Area is a true paradox. It is one of the most polluted areas in the city....yet it holds the last hope for Long Beach to purposely preserve an important and unique piece of our natural environment.
 - The development plans need to be put on hold so current levels of pollution and toxins can be measured and mitigation plans can be "built in" to future development
 - The major threat to the future of this area is uncoordinated development. Any scenario that may disturb or add to existing pollution or contamination, could make the Wetlands impossible to preserve and restore
3. **TRAFFIC**—Any action contributing to increased traffic in this area needs to be closely and seriously scrutinized.
 - The intersection of 2nd Street and PCH is the busiest intersection in Long Beach and one of the most traveled intersections in Los Angeles County.

- Any future development needs to have its traffic impact assessed as a part of all other planned or asked for land use, and NOT as a stand alone project.
 - The responsibility for the approximately 20 traffic lights in the area is divided between the City of Long Beach and CalTrans. The lights are not coordinated! This adds significant time to travel through the Study Area. A committee should be appointed immediately to solve that problem and create a successful plan to synchronize the lights.
 - There is considerable subsidence of Loynes Drive and lower Studebaker Avenue. Some parts of Loynes have six feet of asphalt added to the roadway to keep it drivable. NO heavy truck traffic should be allowed on either of these stretches of road until the sinking problem can be dealt with on a permanent basis.
 - Every attempt to mitigate the traffic load at the 2nd and PCH intersection should be studied thoroughly.
4. **LAND USE**—The Southeast Long Beach Residents are, with minor exception, greatly in favor of creating a MASTER PLAN for the land use aspect of the Study Area. Any change in the existing mix of businesses in the Study Area should be delayed until a Master Plan that includes an update of the current SEADIP plan can be created. It is much more likely that the funding necessary to acquire and restore the Los Cerritos Wetlands, can be successfully attracted, *if* we have a Master Plan that clearly identifies the permitted land uses for the future of the Study Area.

The successful culmination of the preservation of the Bolsa Chica Wetlands is a very positive model for what can be done at Los Cerritos. The Port of Long Beach recently gave the Bolsa Chica preservation group over \$10,000,000 for mitigation credits. We of the LCWSG couldn't help thinking that if a similar amount could be designated to the Los Cerritos Wetlands, those funds, along with a \$7,000,000 commitment from the State that is being held for Los Cerritos acquisition, could play a huge role in the acquisition and preservation of the area. Dr. Jerry Schubel, CEO of The Aquarium of the Pacific, has said,

“American citizens are finally waking up to the fact that the future is not set in concrete, it's what we are willing to make it.”

In the case of the Los Cerritos Wetlands we have the rare opportunity to take actions today that will reverberate for hundreds of years into the future. We, the committee members of the Los Cerritos Wetlands Study Group, sincerely hope that the legacy we have begun with these proceedings will be one that future generations will look back on with appreciation and approval for a job well done. We humbly ask your help that this be accomplished.